

*Conference committee retains \$350 million in emergency aid*

Congressman Peter Welch and leaders of the Congressional Dairy Farmers Caucus on Wednesday hailed an agreement reached by Senate and House negotiators to provide \$350 million in emergency assistance to struggling dairy farmers.

Welch and the bipartisan, 87-member caucus have been urging House conferees to retain funding included in the Senate version of the Department of Agriculture appropriations bill.

In a letter to House negotiators on September 14, the caucus' leadership wrote, "America needs a strong, diverse dairy industry to feed our nation and sustain rural communities. This is an issue of concern to members from every part of the country and from both sides of the aisle."

The agreement reached by negotiators would provide \$290 million in direct support to dairy farmers, while an additional \$60 million would be used to purchase dairy products for government programs – increasing the price dairy farmers would be paid for the milk they produce.

Caucus co-chair Peter Welch (D-Vt.) said, "This funding could not have come at a more critical time for Vermont's hardworking dairy farmers. The price crisis they have weathered during the past year has been staggering. While this emergency assistance will not solve the long-term problems the industry faces, it will provide much-needed temporary support to these dedicated stewards of our land."

Caucus co-chair Joe Courtney (D-Conn.) said, "This is a very welcome step in helping our dairy farmers survive what has been a terrible economic time. I urge Members of the House and Senate to approve the appropriations bill with this funding intact because this truly is an issue of survival for many of America's dairy farms. I applaud the advocacy of the Congressional Dairy Farmers Caucus membership and look forward to passing this legislation post-haste."

Caucus co-chair Tim Walz (D-Minn.) said, "I am pleased that this assistance for dairy farmers will be included in the final version of this legislation. We must continue to assist our dairy producers in these tough economic times to save good paying jobs in our rural communities."

The Congressional Dairy Farmers Caucus, which was founded this summer, includes members from both parties and every region of the country.

Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) included an amendment with the funding in the Senate version of the appropriations bill, and Sen. Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) supported it in the Senate Appropriations Committee.